



**Snohomish County**  
Planning and Development  
Services

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This Assistance Bulletin only applies to property within unincorporated Snohomish County and does not apply to property within incorporated city limits.

Assistance Bulletin

# #96

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[WWW.SNOCO.ORG](http://WWW.SNOCO.ORG)

Keyword: Assistance Bulletins

## Q: What is an Urban Center?

**A:** Urban centers are compact, well-designed areas that concentrate a variety of land uses in one place. Urban centers are people-oriented living and working places that allow residents to walk to shops and high capacity transit stations. The County Council (Council) has designated Urban Centers on the Snohomish County Future Land Use Map (FLUM) where significant population and employment growth can be located,



a community-wide focal point can be provided, and the increased use of transit, bicycling, and walking can be supported. Snohomish County has designated seven urban centers, all located in the unincorporated Southwest Urban Growth Area. The implementing zoning for these seven urban centers is UC. There are six designated urban centers in unincorporated Snohomish County (I-5/164<sup>th</sup> St, I-5/128<sup>th</sup> St, SR 527/196<sup>th</sup> St, SR 99/152<sup>nd</sup> St, I-5/44<sup>th</sup> Ave W, and SR 99/SR 525).

## Q: Are there local examples of urban center development?

**A:** The following developments were constructed under the county's urban center regulations:

- Newberry Square (west of the Ash Way park and ride lot located north of 164<sup>th</sup> St)
- Vintage (north of the Ash Way park and ride lots located north of 164<sup>th</sup> St)
- Oak Heights (north of the Vintage urban center project)
- Avalon Alderwood (southeast corner of 164<sup>th</sup> St and Alderwood Mall Blvd)
- Martha Lake Town Center (southwest corner of 164<sup>th</sup> St and Larch Way)
- Prestonwood (1726 165<sup>th</sup> Place SW, Lynnwood)
- Nichorwynd (15503 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue W, Lynnwood)
- Esplanade (148<sup>th</sup> Street and Seattle Hill Road)
- Zocalo (201<sup>st</sup> Place and Bothell-Everett Highway)

This bulletin is intended only as an information guide. The information may not be complete and is subject to change.  
For complete legal information, refer to Snohomish County Code.

## Q: What is Floor Area Ratio or FAR?

**A:** Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is a measure often used to determine the intensity of land use and provides a measurement of the maximum amount of building that may be constructed on a site. It is similar to dwelling units per acre which is how the density of residential development is often expressed. The definition of FAR is found in SCC 30.91F.445:

*30.91F.445 "Floor Area Ratio" means the net building area divided by the net site area.*

*Floor Area Ratio = Net building area / Net site area*

*30.91B.222 Building area, net ("Net building area") means the total square feet of floor space in a building, excluding areas below finished grade, space dedicated to parking, mechanical spaces, elevator and stair shafts, lobbies and common spaces including atriums.*

*30.91S.355 Site area, net ("Net site area") means the gross area of a site in square feet excluding critical areas and required buffers.*

A higher FAR signifies a higher intensity of land use, and a lower FAR likewise signifies a lower intensity of land use. FAR is increased as the building occupies a greater portion of the parcel, or when additional floors are added. Specifications about how tall a building is, its shape or how it looks are addressed through site and architectural standards.

## Q: What uses are permitted in the UC zone?

**A:** In general, a wide range of retail, office, multiple family residential, civic, and medical uses compatible with transit and pedestrian-oriented development are permitted. The specific list of permitted uses is found in SCC 30.22.100. Some uses are limited to only those legally existing as of May 29, 2010.

## Q: What are the specific regulations that guide development in the UC zone?

**A:** New and re-development in the UC zone must comply with Chapter 30.34A SCC and any other applicable chapters in SCC Title 30 unless the activity is specifically exempted. These regulations govern bulk requirements (such as height and setbacks), the layout of the development (landscaping and on-site circulation), and architectural standards (how the building looks).

## Q: What development is exempt from SCC Chapter 30.34A requirements?

**A:** Per SCC 30.34A.010, the following activities are not subject to the urban center development regulations contained in SCC Chapter 30.34A. Exempted developments shall comply with all other applicable provisions contained in SCC Title 30 (i.e. landscaping, parking, signs, etc.); any applicable environmental regulations (i.e. critical areas and drainage); and applicable building codes. Service stations shall comply with the Planned Community Business regulations.

- Personal wireless communication facility.
- Non-conforming uses
- Service stations constructed prior to May 29, 2010

**Q:** What are the submittal requirements for an urban center development application?

**A:** All applications shall contain the items on the *Urban Center Development Submittal Checklist* available from PDS or may be accessed from the web at:

<http://www.co.snohomish.wa.us/documents/Departments/PDS/Checklists/UrbanCenterSubmittalChecklist.pdf>

**Q:** What is the review process for an urban center development application?

**A:** The review process for approving an urban center development is found in SCC 30.34A.180. There are four categories of development as shown in the table along with the approval authority. A pre-application meeting and pre-application design review board public meeting may be required.

Category	Approval Authority	Pre-Application Meeting (SCC 30.34A.163)	Pre-Application Design Review Board Public Meeting (SCC 30.34A.165)	Appeals
Minor development activities (SCC	Administrative	No	No	Hearing Examiner
Expansion of an existing structure containing a permitted use (SCC 30.34A.026)	Administrative	No	No	Hearing Examiner
Development applications for less than 12,000 ft <sup>2</sup> of gross floor area or 60 dwelling units	Hearing Examiner	Yes	No	County Council
All other development	Hearing Examiner	Yes	Yes	County Council

For “All other development” following the public comment period, at least one meeting shall be held with the county, city/town and developer to review comments on the application.

**Q:** Where can I get additional information on developing in the UC zone?

**A:** For additional questions, please see the separate document titled *Urban Center Zone Frequently Asked Questions* available via the link below. You may also call 425-388-3311 with questions. Copies of the Urban Center Development Submittal Checklist and other required forms are available via the PDS Land Use Forms web page.

<http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/1450/Land-Use>

The website can also be found by typing “Land Use Forms” in the search box on the County’s website, [www.snoco.org](http://www.snoco.org) and selecting the third link from the search list. PDS has also prepared a handbook that may provide assistance in understanding the design standards outlined in chapter 30.34A SCC. This document is available at the link listed above.